

Buddhism for the Younger

[To be Handled Jointly by the Parents and the Children]

To our dear young ones
 sons and daughters
 nieces and nephews
 grandsons and granddaughters

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Introduction

There is no mistaking that in the tradition of the Theravada Buddhist thinking, the growth and education of children, whether they be male or female, is primarily and essentially taken care of by the parents. This is insisted on. This is totally in agreement with the latest and the highly respected educational theories of the world today that the education of a child begins at 0 [zero], i.e. almost at birth. In other words, almost on the mother's lap. Today's more recent thinking pushes it even to a pre-natal stage. It is therefore agreed that the education of children begins in the home. No matter at what age it begins at home, the school is yet a long way to go. Buddhist texts score a first in world educational history, we believe, in declaring that 'parents are the first teachers of a child' [*pubbācariyā ti vuccare* A.N. I.132]. It is they who usher in and introduce the children into the world: *Imassa lokassa dassētāro* loc.cit.

This parental direction of a child in the area of value acquisition is not to be mistaken with parents encrusting the child-mind with dogmas or items of

compulsory belief which are derived through religious and cultural traditions which can quite often be prejudicial. Such dogmas admit of no analysis or scrutiny, evaluations or assessments, however necessitated by the development of scientific thinking or discovery of new challenging data. Inherited beliefs are often weighted down by age-old traditions of religion and society.

As far as Buddhism is concerned, all items of religious beliefs are open to analysis and examination. 'Come and behold' or *Ehi-passiko* is the hall-mark of all religious instruction imparted in Buddhism. Buddhist Dhamma is declared to be *ehi-passiko*. It basically means ' See the truth of it yourself '. The process is what the English word verification means as 'establish the truth or correctness of by examination or demonstration'. This does not necessarily imply any distrust or lack of faith. The essential quality of faith in Buddhism is what is implied by the term *saddhā* [Skt. *sraddhā*]. It is a part of Buddhism as a creed. It is not ruled out. He who has faith or *saddhā* does not necessarily have an apprehension of any latent incorrectness or inaccuracy leading to doubt or skepticism.

The truths of Buddhism have to be discovered and demonstrated by each individual, by himself for himself, and that through a growth of one's own wisdom [*paccattam veditabbo viññūh*]. Nobody need, in the name of Buddhism, bother to prove it for others through laboratory tests or extra-scientific experiments. We do not propose to itemize here such futile attempts which seem to be very much in vogue today.

It is in this spirit of inculcating and promoting Buddhist religious values in the minds of the younger, to be utilized in the process of day to day living, that these lessons are provided globally for the education and edification of the younger. Those who pursue and study these may be Buddhist or even non-Buddhist. We believe that in the world today, they can all benefit from the wise sayings of Buddhism, from wisdom which dates back to more than twenty-five centuries. Please see it for yourself.



Buddhist Attitude to Life in the World

Life in the world, of man and bird and beast, exists on its own right. The universe itself, of which we are only a segment, is believed to have evolved into its present state through vast stretches of time and space. Very similar to the theory of the Big Bang, the Buddhists together with the Indians of the time, held a theory of the 'opening out of the universe' or *vivattamāna-kappa*. Life in the world, according to this, is said to evolve while this process is at work. Possibilities of a terrestrial origin of life for the humans on this earth as well as an inter-planetary cosmic involvement in the process ['cosmic bombardment' i.e. life descending here from other planets] are both contemplated. They also know of the total disappearance of life from time to time in different parts of the universe.

On this basis, Buddhism requires that all humans respect life in all its manifestations which exists in the world around us: man and bird and beast. They pursue this line of thinking 'May all beings be well and happy' [*Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā*. Sn.v.145]. What has come into being, i.e. living things, are referred to as *bhūta*. It is admitted and accepted that all living things love comfort and peaceful continuance [*sukha-kāmāni bhūtāni* Dh. v.131]. They love to live [*jīvitukāmā* D.II. 330] and invariably dislike death [*amaritukāmā* ibid.]. Therefore they are not to be beaten and harassed [*yo daṇḍena vihimsati* Dh.v.131]. They love to continue their life-process and do not wish it to be forcibly terminated [*Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa sabbe bhāyanti maccuno*. Dh.v.129]. Therefore the Buddhist injunction is 'Putting yourself in their position, kill them not nor bring about their destruction' [*Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā na haneyya na ghātaye* ibid.].

According to Buddhist teachings, it is the respect for all life around us which makes any human worthy of his name. That gives him nobility of character. That

makes him an *ariya*. He who harasses and assaults other living things is far from being noble. He cannot be called noble or *ariya* [*Na tena ariyo hoti yena pāṇāni himsati / Ahimsā sabba-pāṇānam ariyo ' ti pavuccati*. Dhṛ.v.270 = A person is not noble if he or she injures living creatures. Through abstaining from injury to all living things, one is called noble.]. Victoria Moran, in her **Compassion: The Ultimate Ethic**, p.29 is seen quoting these ideas of the Dhammapada with great relish [**Compassion: The Ultimate Ethic** by Victoria Moran 4th Edition 1997. The American Vegan Society, 56 Dinshah Lane, P.O.Box H, Malaga, New Jersey 08328].

In our living world, man is regarded as occupying a prestigiously higher position on account of his greater capacity to think and act. Early Buddhism seems to uphold the wisdom of this ancient psycho-ethical concept of man [*Porāṇā pana bhaṇanti manassa ussannatāya manussā*. VvA.18 and KhA.123] as against the more legendary one of presenting the human as the offspring of the First Man or Manu [*Manuno apaccā ' ti manussā*. Ibid.]. He is in a higher grade than the animals who act and live within a framework of built-in reflexes. Buddhism therefore requires man to relate himself to the environment in which he lives, including the fauna and the flora, with a deeper sense of love and understanding. This would ensure the harmonious and successful continuance of man on the planet in which he is sublimely placed.

May all beings be well and happy. May there be peace on earth and goodwill among men.

Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā



Our Children and their Life in the Home

The Role of Parents

'**Good looking houses** do not necessarily a home make'. Without much ado, let us get down to the basic problem of parents and children, in the presence of both parties. In the world today, the presence of unmarried mothers and fatherless children, both of which are no more secrets to the young or the old, seem to ramify the problem to a lamentable degree. The concept of parents and children, particularly in terms of their personal relationships, is driven in many quarters to assume a mythical or legendary character. Such things as traditionally accepted mutual love, respect and regard between parents and children do not seem to exist any more. It is constantly one of serious challenge with regard to what are deemed and termed children's rights. More seriously, they are issues of neglect or harassment of children on the part of parents, with a threatening note of accusation.

The creation of humans in this world apparently has now changed hands. It has now come to be a very much down-to-earth operation. But obviously with a disastrous lack of responsibility and accountability, quite often. With IVF, test-tube babies and surrogate mothers, it is both manageably and visibly in the hands of humans. So far so good. Even school going age boys and girls of today know and are often taught as a part of their school curriculum, everything about human procreation and equally well about interference with it. The world apparently has assumed that it has perfect control over the new process of genetic manipulation. Cloning, we fear, would take the process calamitously further. It becomes doubly serious when one is not capable of determining the honesty and sincerity and the seriousness of motivation and purpose behind such adventures.

Asia has been more conservative, and we do seriously expect it would be left

alone to continue being so, on the relationship of parents and children and their life in the home. The father and the mother in the home, who are visibly there in the presence of their children and must continue to do so, are presented as being entitled to claim, before any other elsewhere, divinity and the right to regulate and govern the lives of those whom they have produced. Buddhist texts in Pali present this idea as *Brahmā 'ti mātāpitāro* which means ' the mother and father are the equals of the believed-in Creator of the world '. Without any further need for theorizing, the visibly known creators of progeny are directly before those whom they have created. Questions of legal and biological paternity are problems we generate today, with our extraordinary skills of manipulation and our ingenuity to shift our responsibilities. We create the problems within the area of domestic life and we seek legal solutions from elsewhere.

In Buddhism, children are regarded as the inestimable [unassessed] assets of the humans. *Puttā vatthu manussānaṃ* - they say. Therefore let us first discover for ourselves the distinctive role which the parents must come forward to play, both to safeguard their own honoured position as parents and to make available to the children their esteemed service in the interests of mankind, through the production of worthy children. 1. It is the mother and the father who jointly bring forth the children into the world, whether it be through the process of normal pregnancies or through *in vitro* fertilization or the more complex mechanism of today's test-tube babies. Therefore the mother and the father are jointly called the generators of progeny or *āpādakā*. 2. Thereafter the parents have to step into the next invariable role of rearing their children [*posakā* = those who nourish and support].

The mother, once pregnant, whether she is married or unmarried, would go through the normal process of bearing the child. This limited time span is the period of the generative process which the Buddhist ethics looks up on with the greatest respect for the woman as mother. The care of the would-be-mother is a matter of serious concern in Buddhist family ethics, i.e. adequate pre-natal care

bestowed on the mother which is called *gabbha-parihāra* [or taking care of pregnancy], well before to-day's ultrasound assistance.

The earliest evidence of this is already reflected in the Angulimāla Sutta, [No.86] of the Majjhima Nikāya [M.N.II.p.97ff.]. There we are told that the Buddha himself requested the newly ordained erstwhile bandit Angulimala to go and wish well and offer blessings and comfort to an expectant mother whom he had seen to be in distressing labour pains. The thera goes to her and on the strength of the good life lived by him since becoming a disciple of the Buddha, wishes comfort and well-being to her and the baby to be born: *sotthi te hotu sotthi gabbhassa*.

The Mahayana tradition of Buddhism offers a similar service to expectant mothers with its concept of the Goddess of Mercy or Koyasu Kannon who takes regular care of pregnant mothers. A fair range of statues of her are seen, in countries like China and Japan, sitting pretty with a babe on her lap [See Koyasu Kannon in Alice Getty's The Gods of Northern Buddhism, p.96f.].

May all beings be well and happy. May there be peace on earth and goodwill among men.

Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā



The Forest - Its grandeur and its freedom

It is repeatedly stated that the Buddha held the forest as a charming and attractive place. This is highlighted by Thera Ekavihariya with these words: 'Let me alone to the forest resort, the place much praised by the Buddha ' [*Handa eko gamissāmi araññaṃ Buddha-vaṇṇitaṃ*. Thag. 538]. The solitude of the forest is obviously its main attraction, the freedom it provides to the solitary dweller: To the solitary dweller in the forest, there is ease and comfort [*Atī ' va phāsu bhavati ekassa vasato vane*. op.cit. v. 537] and ' The forest provides ease to the lone

dweller ' [*Phāsum ekavihārissa*. op.cit. v. 538]. Both as uttered by the same Thera Ekavihāriya means that life in the forest is comforting to the lone dweller. Men and women of all ages in the world today who suffer from stress and strain, generated through various causes, no matter from which continent they come, should be able to utilise this prescription.

In his admonitions to his earnest disciples for the furtherance of their spiritual exercises, the Buddha always points to the trees and forest glades. To Cunda he says: ' Here at the foot of a tree, here in a lonely place, be ye ever contemplative. Waste no time and leave no room for later regrets [*Etāni cunda rukkhamūlāni etāni suññagārāni. Jhāyatha cunda mā pamādattha. Mā pacchā vippaṭisārino ahuvattha*. M.1.46]. He upgrades the value of forest life, indicating the desirable breakaway from the humdrum of urban living. He literally invites his disciples to this mode of life and encourages them to physically detach themselves and vend their way to the forest [*Etha tumhe āvuso āraññakā hotha āraññavanapatthāni pantāni senāsanāni paṭisevathā 'ti. Iti kāyavūpakaṭṭhe samādapetabbā nivesetabbā paṭiṭṭhāpetabbā*. A.111.138]. Seeking solitude in the forest for the furtherance of one's spiritual uplift soon came to be recognised in Buddhist monastic circles as a much praised virtue.

Having put forward what might be termed a Buddhist point of view with regard to love of nature and environment, it is well worth illustrating this in actual operation in Buddhist life. It is best we begin with the Buddha himself. A beautiful story in the Buddhist books describes the Buddha's taking to the region of Kunāla Lake a large number of his disciples who are said to have been afflicted with boredom.

The Pali texts make repeated attempts to show that both the Buddha and venerable Mahā Kassapa, the great stalwart in the Buddhist Order, practised this way of solitary living. They are said to have done so for their own comfort and peace of mind as well as for the purpose of setting a good example for the future

generations. King Pasenadi Koasala praises the Buddha for this special virtue. He says: The Buddha has been a forest-dweller for long lengths of time. [*Puna ca param bhante bhagavā dīgharattam ārannako arannavanapatthāni pantāni senāsanāni paṭisevati*. A. V. 66ff.]. Samyutta Nikaya informs us of Kassapa's preference for this mode of life. Kassapa is seen explaining to the Buddha why he chooses this mode of living and points out that it is the worthy way of life of the Buddhas and the Buddha's disciples [*Ye kira te ahesum budhānubuddha-sāvakā te dīgharattam ārannakā c' eva ahesum arannakattassa ca vaṇṇavādino*. S.11. 203f.]

Thera Mahā Kassapa finds the enchantment of the forest enhanced as the trumpeting of wild elephants reverberates through the upland glades.

Those upland glades delightful to the soul
Where the Kareri spreads its wildering wreaths,
Where sound the trumpet-calls of elephants
Those are the braes wherein my soul delights

[Psalms of the Brethren v.1062]

Kareri-mālā vitatā bhūmibhāgā manoramā

Kuñjarābhirudā rammā te selā ramayanti maṃ [Thag. v.1062]

In the eyes of true Buddhist disciples, beasts of the jungle are not stigmatised as being fierce and wild and hence a threat to man. On the other hand, they are integrated into a harmonious community with man, adequately respecting both their right to be in the forest and the valuable part they can play towards upliftment of man animal relationships. It may be a Nirvana-oriented disciple we discover when we meet Thera Tālapuṭa who can with honesty and sincerity say the following.

There in the jungle ringing with the cries

Of peacock and of heron wilt thou dwell,
 By panthers and by tigers owned as chief.
 And for the body cast off care;
 Miss not thine hour, thine aim.

[Psalms of the Brethre v.1113]

Mayūra-koñcābhirudamhi kānane

Dīpīhi byaggehi purakkhato vasaṃ

Kāye apekkhaṃ jaha mā virāye

[Thag. v. 1113]

The forest in itself obviously reflects its closeness to nature, devoid of the temptations which the humans themselves create, voluntarily or involuntarily, for their own stupification. The very growth of forest life, noticeably insentient, must silently teach its lessons about genesis, growth and decay which is witnessed all around. Volumes of unwritten laws obviously govern it. Man has to submit to this way of nature. Pensive living in the forest must indeed drive these lessons home. It should be clear to everyone today that the 'law of the jungle' is far less wild than that which exists among the urbanized humans. In the jungle, there is obviously no violation of natural justice.

Here we strongly feel that this growth pattern of nature which is remarkably evident in the regions of the forest should be adequately brought back before the urbanized humans who obviously know very little about what life and living are. To get their bearings right, all humans must get themselves acquainted with this. Some degree of home gardening must be re-introduced to our communities. We almost dare say that without a return to agriculture, to grow things on the land and gather their harvests, in a healthy and harmonious way, and in a rewardingly domestic manner, there shall be no survival of a truly human culture in the world today.